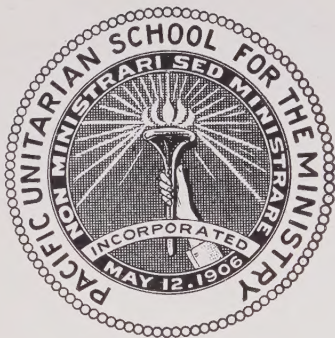


# EXPRESSIVE VOICE CULTURE

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JESSIE ELDRIDGE SOUTHWICK

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# Expressive Voice Culture









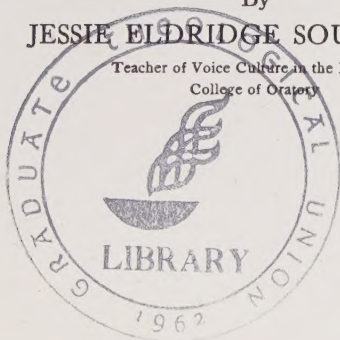
# Expressive Voice Culture

Including  
The Emerson System

By

JESSIE ELDRIDGE SOUTHWICK

Teacher of Voice Culture in the Emerson  
College of Oratory



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THIRD EDITION

EVERETT PRINTING SERVICE  
BOSTON

F 467  
Se 59

## Preface

**T**HE Emerson System treats the voice as a natural reporter of the individual, constantly emphasizing the tendency of the voice to express appropriately any mental concept or state of feeling.

This treatise is a setting forth of methods and principles based upon this idea with a fuller elaboration of the relation of technique to expression. No attempt is here made, however, to present more than an individual contribution to this broad subject.

J. E. S.



# Expressive Voice Culture

## CHAPTER I

### Principles of Voice Culture

THE first essential to one beginning the study of voice culture is an appreciation of the real significance of voice development. We must recognize at once the fact that the voice is a natural reporter of the conditions, emotions, thoughts, and purposes (character and states or conditions) of the individual. The ring of true culture in the voice is that perfect modulation of tone and movement which, without self-consciousness, communicates exactly the meaning and purpose which impel the utterances of the speaker.

It is almost impossible for any person to cultivate vocal expression to the best advantage without an intelligent and sympathetic teacher; he lacks the perspective upon himself which is necessary in order to correct his individual faults and draw out his most effective powers. Then, again, he needs that personal supervision and direction of his efforts which will allow his mind to be constantly occupied with thoughts and principles, and relieve him of all temp-

tation to watch his own performances as such. But it is necessary that the student should have a simple and logical basis for practice, however great may become the variety of its application.

That the voice is naturally expressive is shown in the fact that even where there is no possible suggestion of cultivation we instinctively read the broad outlines of meaning and feeling in the tones and inflections of the voice. May it not therefore be possible that a finer culture will reveal all the subtle shades of thought and feeling, and a more discriminating judgment be able to detect these, just as the ethnologist will reconstruct from some crude relic the history of an earlier civilization?

We must remember, too, that first of all the voice is a vital instrument. The physical condition affects most noticeably the quality, strength, and movement of the voice. Hence we see that physical health is essential to a good voice, and the proper use of the voice is itself one of the most invigorating exercises that can be practised. All the vital organs are called into healthful action through this extraordinary manipulation of the breath, and the nervous system, both vitally and emotionally, receives invigoration.

In the beginning, therefore, such vital conditions as are essential to the production of tone should be considered.

First, a standing position, in which the vital organs are well sustained, is essential. One cannot even

breathe properly unless one stands well. The weight should be mainly upon the balls of the feet, and the crown of the head so positively elevated as to secure the erectness of the spinal column. This will involve the proper elevation of the chest, the essential freedom of respiration, and the right sustaining tension of the abdominal muscles.

(a) Take standing position as follows: weight on balls of feet, heels together, toes slightly apart; line of gravity from crown of head, well lifted, to balls of feet; the ear, point of shoulder, and point of hip should be in line; muscles of the thigh strong in front; ribs well lifted so that front line from waist to throat is lengthened to full extent; back kept erect, and curve at waist not emphasized. Breathe strongly and deeply several times.

To secure the elevation of the ribs the hands may be placed under the arms, as high as possible, fingers pointing down; then try to turn or press the ribs up and forward with strong action of hands, breathing freely and emphasizing strength in waist muscles. *Sustain* the ribs in this elevated position, and thus uplift the chest. Keep shoulders free. Drop hands to sides again.

(b) Take half a step forward; sustain weight on advanced foot; do not change position of retired foot, but keep the sense of purchase in it. The chest should be carried forward of the abdomen and the abdominal muscles given their best leverage by a slight bending forward from the hips. (Bending for-

ward must not be done by any dropping of the chest, or shortening of the line at waist through relaxation.) This position must be light, active, buoyant, and reposeful.

A constant sense of easy balance should be developed through poising exercises.

The habit of healthful and powerful respiration should be established by physical exercise for that purpose, and the right manipulation of breath in tone production should be secured by the nature of the voice exercises. Any vocal exercise which involves in the very nature of its production a good control of breath becomes, by virtue of that fact, a good breathing exercise as well.\*

If the voice be perfectly free, it is then capable of expressing truly all that the person thinks and feels. The first desirable end sought, then, is freedom. What is freedom, and how secured? When all cavities of resonance are accessible to the vibrating column of air the voice may be said to be free. By cavities of resonance is meant the chest (trachea and bronchial tubes), the larynx, pharynx, the mouth, and the nares anterior and posterior, or head chambers of resonance. The free tone is modified through all its varieties of expression by those subtle changes in form, intensity, movement, inflection, and also direction, which are too fine for the judgment to determine, or even observe successfully. These varieties are made possible by the very organism of the

\*See exercises described in a later chapter.



voice, which is vital, not mechanical, and are determined by the influences working from the mind through the nerves which control this wonderful living instrument. This is governed by the law of reflex action, by which stimulation of any nerve center produces responsive action in other parts of the body. The voice will obey the mind. Right objects of thought will influence it much more perfectly and rapidly than the mere arbitrary dictates of calculation.

Right psychology would be the only thing necessary to the thorough cultivation of the voice if the conditions were so perfect that there were no habits of stricture and our instrument were thus in perfect tune. And in spite of the fact that it is not usually found in perfect tune, the influence of practice under right mental conditions is the most potent and indispensable part of voice culture. Let this fact not be lost sight of while we are discussing those more technical methods of training which are designed to tune and regulate our instrument.

First, freedom of voice is attained (technically speaking) by right direction of tone and vital support. A few words of explanation will make this patent.

If the vibrating column of air when it leaves the vocal cords is so directed that it passes freely through all the cavities of resonance, it cannot fail to find the right one. The following exercise, if properly taken, will induce right direction of tone: produce a light

humming sound such as would be the sound of *m*, *n*, or *ng*, if so idealized as to eliminate that element of sound commonly spoken of as nasality. That which is called nasality is caused by the failure of the tone to reach freely the anterior cavities of the nares. The cavity which lies just back of the nose and frontal bone imparts a musical resonance resembling the vibrating after-tone when a note has been struck upon a piano and allowed to die away gradually. The "nasal" effect comes when the tone is confined in the posterior or back part of the nares, or head cavity, or is split by the dropping of the uvula so that part of the tone is directed through the nares and part through the mouth. Many so-called "humming tones" are given for practice, but in accepting them observe whether the foregoing principle is obeyed.

The controlling center of consciousness is the extreme limit of the *nares anteri*. The tone should be thought of as outside. Keep the mind upon results, just as one would hold the thought of a certain figure which one might desire to draw. If one wishes to inscribe a curve, he thinks of the curve as an object of thought, not of the muscles which act in executing it. So with the voice. A tone is not a reality until its form of vibration reaches the outer air. One should always think of the tone one wishes to make — never listen to one's own execution. If the ideal is not reached by the effort it will be known by the sense of incompleteness.

Why is the *nares anteriori* the ruling center of tone direction? The dominant or ruling center of any organism is that point which, if controlled, will involve the regulation of all that is subordinate to it. For example, the heart is the dominant center of the circulatory system; the brain is the dominant center of the nervous system; the sun is the dominant center of the planetary system. In all these systems, if the center be affected, the system is proportionately influenced. If any other part than the dominant center be affected, it is true that all other parts may also be affected, but the desired unity in result will not be secured.

The voice will follow the thought as surely as the hand will reach the object aimed at. The extreme anterior part of the nares, or head cavity, is the chamber of resonance farthest from the vocal cords. Therefore, if the voice be directed through that chamber of resonance all the others must be passed in reaching it, and hence all must be accessible to the vibrating column of air. It is a law of acoustics that any given cavity of resonance will resound to that pitch to which its size corresponds, and to no other. This law of sound secures the appropriate resonance for every pitch much more accurately than it could be secured by an effort to develop chest, middle, and head registers through calculating the differences. Again, we need the higher chambers of resonance to reinforce even the low pitch, because every note has its overtones that enrich it, and if

these cannot find their proper resonance the tone is impoverished. It may be well to explain our use of the term "overtone."

This word "overtone" is used unscientifically by many. The significance of its use is somewhat varied among teachers, but it generally means head resonance, or a tone "sent over" through the head cavities. The term is used here technically, not arbitrarily. Overtones are not confined to the voice, but are those constituent parts of any tone which are produced by the vibrating segments into which any vibrating cord will divide itself.

Any cord, or string, stretched between two given points, when struck will vibrate throughout its entire length in waves of a certain length and with a certain degree of rapidity, according to the tension of the string. This vibration of the entire length of cord gives forth the tone heard as the fundamental pitch or tone. Besides this fundamental or primary vibration, the movement divides itself into segments, or sections, of the entire length. These sections also have vibrations of their own which are of shorter length and more rapid motion. The note given off by these subdivisions is, of course, on a higher pitch than that produced by the fundamental vibration of the cord; hence, they are higher tones, or overtones. It will be remembered that pitch depends upon the rapidity of the sound waves or vibrations. This subdivision of the vibrations is incalculably multiplied, so that it may be said to be impossible to determine

the number of overtones accompanying the fundamental tone. What the ear hears is the fundamental pitch only; the overtones harmonize with the primary or fundamental tone, and enrich it. Since this is a law of vibration, it is unscientific to speak of giving an overtone, for all tones contain overtones. Where these overtones are interfered with by any imperfection in the instrument the result is a harsh or imperfect sound.

In relation to the voice it should now be clearly understood that since it is the overtones which enrich or give a harmonious sound to any tone, and since all tones (low as well as high) have overtones as constituent parts of their being, therefore the whole range of the resonant cavities of the voice should, for the production of pure tone, be open to all degrees of pitch, in order that the overtones may find their appropriate reinforcement in the resonance chambers. Thus the quality of the voice depends, not simply upon the condition of the vocal cords themselves, but upon the form and quality of the resounding cavities.

## CHAPTER II

### Elementary Lessons

**A**FTER this brief discussion of the principles involved in this method of practice, we will proceed to give some essential exercises for practice.

#### EXERCISE FOR SECURING FREEDOM OF TONE

This is the foundation of all voice culture.

1. Take position in accordance with directions given in Chapter I.

2. Take humming tone as indicated in the preceding chapter, — *m*, *n*, *ng*, — idealized and pure. The mouth should be opened and closed without changing the tone.

3. Endeavor to concentrate all consciousness upon the conception of a tone emanating from the *nares anteri* and floating in ideal forms of vibration in the surrounding air. Those forms may vary in their definite nature, but must always obey the principle of curves and radiation. One should never reach up to a tone, but should seem to alight upon it from above, as a bird alights on the branch of a tree. The mind must never lose sight of the result—the ideal aimed at. The knowledge of processes leads us to a right conception of aims, and enables us to judge of their correctness. We should know what processes are

normal (natural and healthful) and what objects of thought will induce them.

While taking the above exercise no effort should be made in the throat. The voice should seem to find its way without effort. The tone should not be loud or sharp.

If the student finds it difficult to produce the tone alone, some word ending in *ing* should be practised, as *ring-ring-ring-ng*.

#### FORMING OF ELEMENTS

*First Exercise.* Start the humming tone as indicated in the first lesson, and maintain the same focus while forming certain elements. Take the syllable *n-ō-m*, allowing no break while going from *n*, the nares sound, to the vowel sound of *o*, and returning to the nares sound of *m*. This is perhaps the best element to begin upon, because of its definiteness, but the same principle can be applied to other elements of speech, as *Most-men-want-poise-and-more-royal-margin*. Form each syllable with the utmost care. Concentrate the mind upon the ideal sound. First be sure that the pronunciation is accurately conceived. Then enunciate clearly and try each time to make the form more perfect. The principle of thinking is the same as that involved in striving to make a perfect circle, or to execute any figure with more and more beauty. The effort of the mind will bring the result, if the conception of the element to be formed be correct. The sentence given — “*Most*

*men want poise, and more royal margin*”—is composed of such alternation of elements as will tend to bring forward those that might be formed too far back by their association with those elements that are necessarily brought to the front. For example, the word *poise*. The first and last elements are distinctively front. That helps to bring out what is between.

The constant recurrence of the nares tone, as in *m, n*, etc., may serve as a regulator of tone. The object of this step in practice is to form elements with beauty, and to form them with the same focus as that secured by the humming tone. In this stage of practice each element should be dwelt upon separately, but not in such a way as to mar its expression. For example, unaccented syllables should be lightly pronounced and the right shading carefully observed. Otherwise, when the elements are put together their harmony and smoothness will be wanting and the effect labored and mechanical, as is often the case where attention has been given to the practice of articulation. To make the effort of articulation a vital impulse in response to a mental concept, — this is the object sought. The principle is that the will should be directed toward the ideal to be reached, while the mind comprehends the means incidentally. The means may be considered as a matter of knowledge, useful in guiding the judgment but a hindrance when used as a trap to catch the conscious attention of the practising student.



The whole difference between the artist who is spontaneous and the artisan who is artificial is that the one recognizes the fact that the very existence of human expression proves that the mind awakens the instinctive response of the physical organism, while the other thinks that he can calculate that infinite harmony which makes unity of action, without reverting to the first cause of expression — the thought that created it. To reproduce the impulse born of the thought — this is the aim of a psychological method. This is secured only by right objects of thought; it is impossible to reach it by voluntary mechanics.

#### SMOOTHNESS AND HARMONY OF UTTERANCE

Having obtained the results sought in our last division, we should learn to manipulate the elements of speech fluently without breaking their relation to (harmony with) the primary focus, or direction of tone.

Practise the same sentence, "*Most men,*" etc., striving to make every tone and the form of every element perfect, without dwelling upon them separately; practise this (as also the preceding exercises) upon various degrees of pitch in the musical scale, generally beginning on a "medium high" pitch, then lower, and afterwards higher. Strive to speak or sing fluently without breaking the quality of tone used. A break in quality signifies loss of focus.

The object of this practise is to attain facility in

manipulating the elements while maintaining the smooth quality of the tone. After this sentence other sentences may be used in reference to the same idea. The primary exercise given should always be reverted to as a working center, in order to secure, through repetition, a deepening of the tendency involved. Variety is admissible only in addition to the original exercise, but should not be substituted for it.

#### FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSICAL EXPRESSIVENESS OF TONES

This opens the way to expression in tone, — dramatic expression, — but the technical preparation for expressive responsiveness in the voice is the development of its musical possibilities, for all artistic expression in tones is musical whether the person be a singer or a speaker. Inflections are variations in pitch, and are “the tune of the thought.”

*Exercise* .Practise the syllables *mä*, *zä*, *skä*, *ä*. The sound of the Italian *a*, as in *ah*, gives the freest position of the organs for the production of tone, and perhaps the most difficult form in which to direct a tone with certainty. It is combined with these consonant elements in order to invite it forward and bring it to a point (figuratively speaking). The *m* relates it to the nares or humming tone (which is the basis of all resonance in the voice). The *z* sharpens the consciousness at the front, and the *sk* furnishes a good start for a positive stroke in the voice, while the *a* alone leaves us to venture upon the free tone

unassisted by these guides to direction. The exercise should be practised with such musical variations as the student can learn to execute—the scale, arpeggios, etc., both sustained tone and light touches, broad tones and shaded tones. Other vowels may also be practised thus.

The practice of rhythm, or the practice of rhythmical accent, should be introduced, as the sense of rhythm is an important element in the development of expressiveness.

The object now is to secure sensibility and responsiveness in the voice. This opens the possibilities of vocal expression. When we speak of the *nares anteriori* (or front head resonant cavity) as the dominant center of physical consciousness nothing mechanical is meant. One is conscious that the eye is fixed upon an object, but not therefore conscious of the action of the muscles used in turning it upon the object. One thinks not of the eye, but through the eye toward the object.

Finally, technique has as its object the training of the instrument to freedom and responsiveness; but the true art of vocal expression begins when the instrument is used in obedience to such objects of thought as should cause its strings to vibrate loudly or softly, all together or in partial harmony, in obedience to that vital impulse which the instrument itself was created to obey.

### CHAPTER III

## The Higher Development of the Voice by the Application of First Principles

THERE are four general forms of emphasis which serve as indications of the characteristics of expression. They are Force, Pitch, Volume, and Time. Force corresponds to life, or vitality, in the voice. Pitch corresponds to the range of the voice, and expresses affection or attraction. Volume measures the activity of the will through the voice, and Time, the expression of which depends principally upon movement, or rhythm, corresponds to the intellectual activities.

It will be understood that these forms of expression, or emphasis, are developed, according to the practice in the "Evolution of Expression," by means of purely mental discipline. It is nevertheless possible to reinforce these powers of the voice by technical practice with special reference to this development. In taking up this branch of the work the student is supposed to have fulfilled the requirements of the elementary voice practice, which, it will be remembered, includes the establishment of freedom by means of right direction of tone, the perfecting of the elements in polished articulation, the facile

handling of the voice in combining various elements, and a certain degree of responsiveness in the practice of various musical qualities.

#### FORCE

For the development of increased vital power in the voice the student should practise the nares exercise and also the elements of speech in a sustained and even manner, continuing tones as long as it is possible to keep control of them. The effect of this is to establish *strength and steadiness* in the action of the muscles that control the voice, and increase of breathing-power in response to the requirements involved in the exercise. The tone must be kept pure and free, and practised with varying degrees of force, with the idea of steady projection and determined control. The ability to sustain the tone for a long time will increase, and with it the power of the muscles exercised.

The idea of projecting tone is based upon the feeling of sympathy with those at a distance, and not simply upon the desire to make them hear. Short passages of a vital and animated nature should be practised with varying degrees of radiation, so that the consciousness of the student may adapt itself to the idea of including in his sympathies a larger or smaller number of people. The thought of sympathy with, or nearness to, those addressed is a most important principle in the development of this power. It is never the best way to strive to speak

loud in order that one may be heard. Such selections as Lanier's "Life and Song," Wordsworth's "The Daffodils," and Scott's "Lochinvar" will be found helpful studies for radiation. It is useful in practising the humming tone, or the nares tone, to imagine the whole atmosphere pervaded with pure resonance. Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the idea of perfect purity as the essential foundation of power. The pure voice will grow to power. In taking this exercise there should be no consciousness of effort in the throat, and no shade of sharpness should be heard in the tone. One must try for the pure, pervasive resonance which seems to float on the air like the soft note of a violin. The right condition for the expression of this radiant vitality in the voice is a complete alertness and responsive vivacity of the whole person. This animation should be vital and not nervous.

#### PITCH

A voice, to express variety, must have sufficient compass to give opportunity for a free play of inflection over various degrees of pitch. It has been said, "Inflection is the tune of the thought." It is that which makes it attractive. If one desires to emphasize a point of thought and make it attractive to another person he instinctively increases his emphasis by lengthening the slide or inflection. The high pitch indicates mental activity; the medium pitch is the normal or heart range; the low pitch is

more peculiarly vital. If one would express varieties of thought with brilliancy and effectiveness, the range of his voice must be wide, and the evenness of quality so perfect that he can glide from one extreme of pitch to another without any break in the tone. Facility in thus handling the voice may be developed by means of special attention directed to this characteristic. The practice for securing this adaptability in the modulations of pitch is as follows.

Begin with the nares or humming tone, giving it on as many different notes of the scale as can be easily reached. Practise the scale gliding from one note to another while maintaining the pure tone. Practise gliding in the form of inflection, or slide, from one extreme of pitch to another. This may be given with variations, according to the ability of the student to control his voice with evenness and to maintain that pure smoothness of gradation in quality which permits no break or interruption in gliding from one pitch to another. These varieties of practice in slides and scales should be introduced with the practice of various elements of speech, as well as with the humming tone. The different vowels should be so used. Selections for practice should be chosen which contain much variety of thought and feeling and are smooth in movement. For instance, Tennyson's "Song of the Brook," "The Bugle Song," practised with the introduction of the bugle notes and their echoes, and various other selections of a musical and attractive nature, may be adapted to

this practice by simply exaggerating the slides which one would naturally make in bringing out the meaning. No extravagant or unwarrantable inflections which will mar the expression of the thought should be permitted, but it is quite desirable to gradually extend the range of the inflections, if one still maintains in the practice that common sense which will leave the expression in perfect symmetry when the extra effort made for inflection shall have been withdrawn. Though it is sometimes desirable to exaggerate one element, even to the sacrifice of others, it is never necessary to introduce false notes, the effect of which may remain as a limitation upon the expression of the selection used.

#### VOLUME

Other things being equal, the volume of voice used measures the value that the mind puts upon the thought. Of course the expression of this value is modified and characterized by the nature of the thing spoken of. For example, one would express the value of the ocean with a different quality from that which would be used in expressing the value of something exquisitely delicate. All elements of expression modify each other, so that no mere rule can cover all cases. Volume is not always expressed in the form of extension of power, but is frequently manifested in the form of intensity or compressed volume. It is scarcely necessary to explain the difference between the expression of mere vital power



in the voice and that manifestation of the will which gives the impression of directed energy. The will determines, and the impetus of the thought is measured by, the adjustment of volume. Vitality is expressed in radiation; will is expressed in focus.

The term "volume" may be broadly used to cover the characteristics of the thing estimated, and hence to include something of that subtle expression which we call color in the voice. Volume expresses will; color expresses imagination. For this use of the voice in the special service of will-power, or propelling force, it is necessary first to test its freedom. This may be done by taking the humming tone and bringing to bear upon it a strong pressure of energy. If the tone sharpens under the strain it is not perfectly focused. If it remains mellow one may venture upon the next step, which is to practise various vowel sounds and elements of speech with concentrated energy. The sense of bearing on to the voice, or endeavoring to push the tone by any pressure whatever, should be absolutely avoided. Tone support should be carefully regarded. In order to secure this a correct standing position must be held and the muscles about the waist and the abdominal muscles must be firm and elastic.

The chin is, in articulation, the pedal of power, and decision in the conscious action of the chin (not the jaw) will induce by reflex action that stroke which expresses well-aimed will-power. It may be noticed in connection with this suggestion that when

a person means what he says the action of the chin is likely to be noticeably decided.

The perfectly alert and self-commanding attitude of the body cannot be too strongly urged at this point, for the voice cannot be used safely with great power when the body itself is in a negative attitude; for it must be remembered that the voice is a reporter, and if we attempt to force it to report something that is not there it will repay us by casting the lie in our throat. Power is the result of growth, and can be developed only by patience and the securing of such conditions as will establish freedom and certainty. The certainty of any tone depends upon the perfection of its focus. Quality is the synthetic effect of these attributes in the voice. Under this head selections of a warlike nature may be practised, and those which have in them the thoughts of magnitude and importance. Spartacus's "Address to the Gladiators" is excellent; also, Byron's "Apostrophe to the Ocean," "The Rising in '76," and selections of a similar nature.

#### TIME

##### *Including Poise and Rhythm*

The significance of time is determined by the movement of any selection, or, in other words, the rhythm. It will be noticed that a selection may be read with rhythmical effect and be made quite impressive without much emphasis of other characteristics. However, the responsiveness of the voice in

variety of pitch, quality, and power is also a very large factor in the illumination of the pause. The pause, as a mere interruption of sound, has little significance, but the relations that the different sounds bear to each other lend significance to the pause. A pause should always suggest an orbit of thought. These characteristics of expression can be made effective only by the practice of concentration in the mind itself upon the thoughts to be suggested. Nevertheless, the quick responsiveness of one's sensibilities in the expression of the various qualities developed by the cultivation of the voice greatly facilitates the manifestation of the thought itself.

All selections of a high order have relation to rhythm in their composition, and that style of movement in the composition should find its ready response in the organism of the speaker or reciter. It should be remembered that the sense of rhythm may be misapplied, as may any other element, by allowing the mind to go off into the sensation of "jingle" without reference to its expression of the thought or its relation to the thought. But if the sense of rhythm is duly developed, and then this sensibility, as well as all others, is surrendered to the service of the thought, it furnishes an element of beauty which cannot easily be dispensed with. The reason we associate rhythm with the significance of time is that rhythm is a measurer of time.

In connection with this step the practice of melo-

dies is useful, if one has musical taste. Simple, familiar melodies are best — such as “The Last Rose of Summer,” “Annie Laurie,” “Flow Gently, Sweet Afton,” etc., etc. The importance of rhythm is well expressed by Emerson, who said that the rhythm of Shakespeare’s verse was always the outcome of the thought.

The term “ellipse” has been sometimes used to express the implied action of the mind during the pause — describing an orbit of thought implied but not stated in the words.

The illumination of the pause, or the responsiveness of the voice, in exhibiting those modifications of quality which give significance, may be greatly enhanced by the practice of such selections as express much beauty of thought and variety of significance, — such as Shelley’s “The Cloud,” — things which are somewhat philosophical in their significance; by selections which suggest much more than is definitely stated, — “Aux Italiens,” by Owen Meredith, “He and She,” by Edwin Arnold, “Evelyn Hope,” by Robert Browning; also chapters from philosophy that is poetically expressed, such as Emerson’s “Essays.” In practising these for the special development of significance every effort should be made to realize the thought quality in the voice, so that each word may seem to picture forth the full truth that lies behind it, and that all shall move in such harmony as to suggest the deeper meanings. The quality of expressiveness, or clear response to

thought in the voice, it will be observed, is secured through the ready service of all its powers under the influence of the mental concept. It is to be attained by the attitude of receptivity and the effort to think through the voice.

This form of expression in voice corresponds to the suggestive in art, and when the student has attained the power of fulfilling its requirements his work can be called artistic. One should never attempt to measure his progress by listening to himself directly; but keeping the ideal in mind, he may come to realize himself as harmonizing with that, and a sense of freedom from limitation will at last crown his endeavors.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Relation of Technique to Rendering

**I**T is certainly true that the highest use of the voice is the revelation of the soul. The most important and effective means of cultivation lie in the exercise of the voice under such mental conditions as shall invite the expression of the highest thoughts, but the voice is in one sense an instrument which is capable of being attuned. Right technical study and practice adjust the instrument in proper relations with the natural laws of its use, and establish, or deepen, the tendency to obey those laws. Hence the mind finds a more ready response in the instrument, and one is able to express with greater facility all that the soul desires to reveal. It would seem of little consequence that a person should be able to use the voice well simply as an ornamental accomplishment; for these agents of expression, these powers of the material being, have a higher significance than the mere exhibition of any qualities, however admirable. Such a motive in studying expression would be a very shallow one, for what would it signify in comparison with the great purposes of living?

But so long as these instruments of ours do not serve us they are a hindrance to the higher expres-

sion of our being and the accomplishment of our highest mission to others. We do indeed desire to escape from the material and transient into the world of eternal verities, but these conditions are given us for a purpose. They have their use, and we cannot escape from the imprisonment in which we find ourselves until we have solved their meaning and conquered them for the service of the higher mind. We therefore study, not for the attainment of particular feats, but to secure the obedience of all our activities to the higher laws through which they can fulfil the purpose for which they were created.

This harmonizing of the forces having been once accomplished, little time is required to keep in tune this harp of the soul; while the broader culture and the higher realization of all meanings that can be expressed are constantly sought in such discipline of the mind itself as shall secure the activity of its highest powers. The whole aim is to secure the development of character by the expression of the highest elements of character.

Although the voice, like all other agents of expression, is naturally the reflector of the individual and his states, it is necessary to understand what that statement implies in order to appreciate the great need for the higher culture of the vocal organism. If the individual's condition were attuned to perfect harmony, to perfect unity of action, and to singleness of purpose, together with the habit of personal expression rather than expression through

some limited mode of action — if, indeed, this were so, his voice would scarce need training, — certainly not corrective training, — nor would he need “culture” of any kind, being already a perfect human being.

Those who postulate the “perfectly natural” voice, *i.e.*, one that is unconscious of its own art, either presuppose this condition of innate perfection or assume that the simple wish to speak — and its exercise — will be sufficient to overcome wrong habits and conditions. Will it? Let us see.

The culture of expression is a very different thing from the artful imitation of the signs of feeling and purpose. If we are to have a real education along lines of expression we must begin with the “content,” or cause, of expression. We may for the moment postpone discussion as to the relative power of the sign to evoke the feeling, and the power of the feeling or condition to evolve the most effective sign. There is something to be said upon both sides; and, surely, the truth lies in the adoption of all good means to produce the desired end.

First, then, to the basis. All oratorical values are measured primarily from the standpoint of the “what;” the “how” is important, too, but only in its relation to the “what” and “wherefore.” The voice of the orator must be an influence—a sincere vibration of the motive within. Theoretically it is so naturally, but practically it is so only when the voice is free from bias and is responsive through habit or



spontaneous inspiration to the thought of the speaker.

We will admit that genius sometimes is great enough to bring into harmonious action all powers of the individual under its sway; but education mainly strives to unfold the imperfect, to balance the ununified elements. Even genius, however, needs direction and adjustment to secure the most perfect and reliable results. How, then, shall we develop the motive, how enlarge the content?

There is such a subtle relation between motive and action that it has been said, "The effect of any action is measured by the depth of the motive from which it proceeds."\* And so this is why the clever performer cannot reproduce the effect of a speech of Demosthenes or Daniel Webster. This is a reason aside from that arising from the difference in the occasion. Great men and great artists *make* the occasion in the hearts of their hearers. The voice of the orator peculiarly should be free from studied effects, and responsive to motive. It is not the voice of entertainment, but of influence above all. The orator should be taught self-mastery. The orator who is not moved by high moral sense is a trickster or a hypocrite; the former juggles with human susceptibility for unworthy or inadequate ends, and the latter poses for motives he has not. So complex is human nature that this can be done by a good actor so as to deceive the judgment and feelings; but the

\*Ralph Waldo Emerson

influence will ultimately reveal the truth, if the auditor will use intuition and not be taken off guard by the psychic influence of a strong will bent on a given effect.

The sincere endeavor to express a quality, with the aspiration to make it real, has the tendency to focus the power of that quality and concentrate the mind upon it. This, by repetition of effort, both increases the power and facilitates its expression. One must come to think vividly in terms of expression. In the instance before us it should be in terms of vocal expression. Anything well expressed — unconsciously — is to real art what innocence is to virtue, or what the spontaneous grace of a child is to that grace as applied to forms definitely intended to communicate an ideal to others. Self-consciousness must precede super-self-consciousness.

Unconsciousness is childishness in art, and leads to vagueness of meaning, to the perpetuation of personal idiosyncrasies; and while a larger consciousness may be induced from the mind side, positive and over-whelming inspiration will be needed to overcome habitual limitations. A musician must love music itself, as well as its meanings, and a voice cannot be made the best of by one who does not love its music. Self-consciousness represents the stage of work and endeavor where faults are being overcome, power enlarged, and new forms of activity mastered. This may be at first a hindrance to spontaneity, and seem to hamper the imagination; but

as facility is acquired joy comes back, and the joy of conquest with the adustment of means to ends is a stage of self-consciousness dangerous for the ego-tist, but is inspiration and incitement to larger effort. This is a stage where many artists remain—most of the time. But the super-conscious stage is that state in which with perfected facility and power of self-mastery the doing becomes lost in supreme realization; and right action, now become habitual, is forgotten in the full consciousness of oneness with the ideal. Then the voice—or the artist—embodies the ideal, becomes the part for the time being, and is, as we say, inspired.

We may forget what we are doing, but we must be able to know, or there will be nothing worth while to forget! The danger of the mechanical idea—the extreme technician's notion that the sign is enough—is that the person may become an automaton and inhibit the power of real feeling in himself; and though he may perform admirably and win the applause of some critics who love form unduly, he fails in the great issue and wins only superficial success or fails utterly, without seeing why. The real experience has a magnetism of its own and will win above mere technicality whenever it has the opportunity.

Some believe that psychic response to the sign is desirable. This develops merely sensitiveness, reflex action, and does not enlarge the power of feeling nor encourage the motive and the real heart. The de-

sirability of emotional response quickly reaches its limit; and while it may be feeling, it does not spring from an adequate cause, so has not the dignity and sweep of absolute sincerity. We must have *motif* first, then technique to adapt and adjust expression and to develop facility in the active agents. We want the Real, idealized by Art, and the Ideal, made real and tangible by Art, the Revealer!

The process we would follow, then, is, primarily, the training of the imagination to conceive fuller and fuller ideals of music and meaning; and, simultaneously, the exercise of such activities as shall increase the capacity of vocal expression and the availability of the vocal powers. Availability is of the utmost importance! Concentration is the prime requisite in attaining rapid results. The student must concentrate absolutely upon the various qualities sought, and must infuse intelligent impulse into his every nerve and muscle! The vibrant voice of the spirit cannot be evoked by half-hearted effort, lazy nerves and muscles, nor with the drag of inattention. The student who does not intend to arouse himself need hope for no keen sense of beauty.

The voice is, first of all, a messenger of spirit, and illustrates this in that quality which has given rise to the expression "borne on the wings of song." Ultimately the whole body will be conceived to be a sensitive vibrator responding with dramatic sympathy and returning vital radiance to the tones. The rightly cultivated expressive voice is the man — speaking.

## CHAPTER V

### Phases of Vocal Interpretation

#### ARTICULATION

THE quality of artistic beauty in articulation is very important, beyond the mere accuracy which is ordinarily thought of. There are five general heads under which the characteristics to be sought may be grouped.

First, *Accuracy of Form*. This not with severity, but with perfection coming from sensitive response of the articulating organs to the form concept as held in the mind. One should avoid the practice of exertion in the execution of articulated forms.

Second, *Tone Quality*, secured by the right relation of the tone form to the line of resonance, is very important and may be attained by careful attention to musical beauty and a sense of harmony. This is the right *placing* of tones.

Third, *Proportion* must be carefully considered. Very often unaccented syllables are made unduly prominent and unimportant words are over-emphasized through lack of attention to this principle. The careful appreciation of rhythm, or the *movement* of syllables in enunciation, gives a flowing, easy, well-proportioned clearness that is indispensable to

beauty. This should be practised in connection with the interpretation of melodious, *flowing* passages, which will furnish opportunity for the appreciation of the relation between the accented and unaccented syllables and the important and unimportant words. Such material as Bryant's "Thanatopsis" is good.

Fourth, *Phrasing*. The careful observation of the three foregoing aspects of articulation leads at once to the fourth; namely, the expressive value of words in direct relation to the interpretation itself. This is closely connected with phrasing, and the phrase, which is the larger "thought word," should be studied as the communicating link between the articulation of the part and interpretation as it relates to literature itself. In connection with this comes the consideration of slides and the finer modulations of tone-color, movement, and cadence. But the study of word values, in the light of the whole phrase to be interpreted, will make each word a living thing in its influence — a winged messenger of the thought.

Fifth, *Slides*. The slide has already been referred to as the unit of vocalization in speech as distinct from the province of song, the unit of song being the scale of notes as sung in succession, but with distinct individuality. Few who have not studied the matter carefully appreciate the fact that the speaking voice suggestively covers as wide a range as the singing voice ordinarily does. But it is essential

that the even development of range from high to low pitch should enable the student to glide without break from one extreme of pitch to another. Inflection is often inferred by the mind of the listener when the person speaking abruptly drops from high to low pitch without rendering the intervening sound. The absence of the fulfilment of inflection robs the speech of much of its musical quality and much of its appeal to the feelings; for inflection is the musical expression of the thought, and depends upon feeling. The expression of this relationship of intelligence and emotion is a subtle and powerful appeal, — the realization of true culture, — combining thought and feeling. We know what a man means literally by the abrupt or emphatic changes of the pitch or pressure; but we know what the fact means to his feelings by the slides and cadences. It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of that characterization which awakens a keen sense of the *musical* meaning as corresponding to the *thought*. This perception brings music into the speech and, if it be awakened to the extent of a real love for the music itself, develops a smooth and quiet clearness in the communication of thought and feeling which is the greatest charm of conversation and of descriptive and narrative utterance.

#### VOCAL RANGE

It is ordinarily considered that the range of the speaking voice is very limited as compared with the



singer's range. A little consideration of what is involved in the full development of the power of slide should show us that while the key-note of speech fundamentally may not vary widely, the suggestive music of the voice in long slides often does cover a great number of notes. A little experiment will demonstrate this. Take any selection containing variety in idea colored by feeling and try making the long lines of inflection, keeping the proportion good and modulating into a very shadow of sound, yet wholly appreciable. That which the student of expression calls length of line is very largely expressed in range of inflection as well as in the extension of time and modulation of volume. The range of tone in every voice should cover as many degrees of pitch as possible, as these are needed in word painting no less than in dramatic expression.

It is claimed by singers that the practice of speech as an elocutionary exercise is sure to lower the pitch of the voice so as to depress the so-called higher register. This is doubtless true to a large extent, as manifest in the conditions common, but it is by no means a certainty that a sufficient balance of practice upon the delicate, esthetic lines of the voice in high pitch and in such selections as Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" may not counterbalance the over-emphasis upon low tones which is ordinarily practised by students of the speech arts. The orotund, sonorous, and forceful qualities are perhaps dwelt upon too much, and to have a full voice is frequently



the greatest care of the elocutionist. There are, however, those who appreciate the musical varieties of the vocal power and who hold flexibility, range, and great variety as of more importance than absolute power. It is the experience of such that the voice may be extended in its range in both directions at once. The high pitch represents mentality, the esthetic phases of beauty, and much brilliancy. The medium pitch expresses warmth, emotion, and the heart qualities. The low pitch is used for grandeur, and all the vital and broad expressions. The use of the slide makes possible infinite blending of these various characteristics in expressing the complexities of meaning which involve rapid transition from one to the other of the fundamental characteristics, or a combination of all three.

#### DRAMATIC EXPRESSION IN THE VOICE

Dramatic adaptation in expressing various characters, emotions, and motives is potentially very great. Though the average speaker is generally limited by one type of voice, which he varies somewhat, it is not often disguised. It is the belief of the writer that this is largely due to a psychological limitation. It requires broad sympathy and a vital realization of the subjective view-point of different characters, with an appreciation of the relative force of different appeals to those characters, in order that the responsive voice may have the convincing ring which expresses the psychology of the character

represented, and not merely the mannerisms and externalities of impersonation.

Impersonation may be more easily achieved intellectually, requiring only keen observation and the power of imitation. Dramatic interpretation, on the other hand, deals mainly with the phase of human nature which is not exterior — the interior force of the character. We would classify these two departments in this way, though in the highest dramatic work elements of both phases are combined. Pantomime is more essential to the development of impersonation, but dramatic interpretation gathers power from the psychological appreciation attained from the studies pertaining to personal development. In dramatic interpretation the voice is a much more significant feature relatively than is the detail of gesture in pantomime. Impersonation absolutely requires the finest detail of mannerism to be represented in the action.

It has been very well demonstrated that the quality of the so-called "line" of the voice is influenced in accordance with dramatic action. If one makes a gesture expressive of directness, the tone of the voice, if given with the simultaneous impulse, will express that characteristic. If subtlety or sinuousness of meaning is desired, the body and the gesture of the hand may be powerful aids in inciting vital expression in the voice. In order to test this, take a certain tone like *ah* or *o* and hold it while taking vital dramatic attitudes differing widely in significance.

This may also be done in the practice of single words or short sentences. Take some such word as "come" or "go," "forward" or "away," practising with different attitudes, and it will be seen at once that it is almost impossible to make tone and dramatic action contradict each other.

Fine descriptive shades may be attained by taking such selections as Byron's "The Ocean," Bryant's "Thanatopsis," Shelley's "The Cloud" and "Ode to West Wind," accentuating with gestures of the arm and hand every sweep or impulse of the word-painting, letting the curve of the figure described in the air by the hand correspond with what is wanted in the mind by the picture. Then, if the vital center of dramatic action is aroused and the tone support is good, the voice alone — all gestures withheld — can reproduce the same impressions. This is often of great advantage, as the strength of repose is expressed to a great degree in restraint of movement. However, it is advisable for the student of expression not to be too absolute in determining how much he will or will not "make gestures." The person whose impulse is not sufficiently strong from the center may do far better to arouse activity of the organism by more action than to allow any inadequacy of nervous energy to depress the power of vibration which determines the influence of the voice.

There are many simple principles and laws of expression that may be advantageously used in preparation for public recitation or finished interpretation.

The emphasis of various qualities appearing in typical selections, such as beauty in "The Chambered Nautilus," by Holmes, and other selections of varying character, intensifies both the appreciation and the power of expression in different characteristics. Careful observation and analysis of the modes of different qualities which manifest themselves in this way give full resource, and then whatever quality we have mastered and stored in our nerve centers through appreciation will spring up spontaneously under the influence of inspiration, making calculation practically needless at the time of one's highest artistic expression. Analysis and practice in preparation are the steps over which we must climb to the platform of power. Having attained this, the infinite variety of the broader vision calls forth the expression of all that has been previously involved.

Dramatic adaptation, then, from the standpoint of expressive voice culture, is attained by free and varied development, focused in the psychological triumph at the moment of interpretation. The body is as a musical instrument of which the voice is the reporter. There are two things to be sought in the artistic voice: one is concentration of consciousness in the vibration of the tone so that the voice may be filled with conscious motive; the other is the response of the free voice to the powerful act of the imagination. Affirmatively, the voice vibrates with the

individual message. Reflectively, it mirrors the ideal conceived at the moment of speech. The orator must have the former of these two powers of the voice. The artist, though emphasizing the latter, can scarcely achieve power in this without also attaining the former.

#### LYRIC INTERPRETATION

In the rendering of lyric poetry there are two extremes to be avoided. One is the musical tendency to obscure the sense, as in "sing-song" rendering; the other is the reactionary effort made by many would-be sensible people to make prose of the poetry by excluding all the music and rhythm in emphasizing the literal meaning. The following rule will be found a safe guide. Use the rhythm and quality pertaining to the full musical expression, modified by the inflection called for by the meaning, having careful reference to the perfect phrasing of the thought. The fulfilment of both of these complementary requirements will produce rhythmical and tone modulations characteristic of the poetry as such, and at the same time the full meaning will be brilliantly manifest. It has been said that the meaning of all great poetry is emphasized by its music. Much more attention should be given than is ordinarily devoted to the consideration of rhythm. Even prose has its peculiar rhythmic movement which constitutes its style and gives impetus.

Finally, by concentration of every distinctive phase, synthesized by a vital motive aroused by the message spoken, the voice becomes musical, forceful, clear, vibrant in the fulfilment of its natural function. The voice is the most potent influence of expression, the winged messenger between soul and soul.







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